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SUBJECT: PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO OPEN ON MONDAY, TEACHERS PLAN TO
GO TO WORK

REF: CONAKRY 0325

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Guinea,s 2008/2009 public school year is set to begin on Monday, October 13. The last session ended with a nationwide teacher strike in June during the national exam period (reftel), which was called off a week later when the GoG and the teachers negotiated an agreement. However, the GoG has failed to implement most of the provisions of the agreement, which were supposed to have been completed before the start of the new school year. A union leader told Poloff that the teachers plan to return to work on Monday as scheduled, but will likely be discussing their next course of action once they get settled in. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Poloff met with Elhadj Sy Savane, secretary general of Guinea,s teacher,s union, on October 16 to discuss GoG progress toward fulfilling promises made in June after a week-long labor strike (reftel). According to Savane, the GoG has successfully addressed two of the issues, but for the most part, the GoG has not upheld its end of the bargain.

¶3. (SBU) Pursuant to the negotiated agreement, the GoG implemented a salary increase in June that had been approved months earlier. In September, the GoG began paying one of several agreed upon miscellaneous allowances for course preparation, insurance, licensing fees, etc. In addition, the GoG and the teachers, union established an oversight committee to oversee the implementation of the agreement. The three education ministers, the finance minister, and the minister of public administration sit on the committee. Savane said that the committee had met several times and plans to do so again next week.

¶4. (SBU) However, the bulk of the union,s demands remain unresolved. These demands include replacement of senior education officials, payment of salary arrears, hiring and appointment of new teachers, payment of the remaining allowances, conversion of contractors to permanent status, doubling of salaries, and payment of a government subsidy to the union.

¶5. (SBU) When asked about the GoG,s political will to address union complaints, Savane said that GoG has always been very good at making promises, but slow to act. He said that Prime Minister Souare seems sincere in his commitment, but the implementation falls apart at the technical level. Offering an example, Savane said that the recently fired minister of finance was blocking many of the actions because of his refusal to release the needed funds. &Sometimes we have to wait for the prime minister to intervene in order to move forward,8 he said.

¶6. (SBU) Despite the GoG,s failure to deliver on its promises, Savane said that the teachers plan to report to work on Monday as scheduled. He did not discount the possibility of an eventual continuation of their labor

strike, but said that everyone needs to come back to work so that they can have an opportunity to communicate and discuss the issues. &Everyone has been out on vacation and difficult to reach; we have to wait for everyone to come back together,8 he said.

17. (SBU) Poloff noted that the GoG had postponed the start day from October 15 to October 20 for primary and secondary schools, and November 3 for universities, and asked if the delay had anything to do with the union,s issues. According to Savane, the GoG was forced to delay the start date because of technical problems. He said that some of the teachers had not been paid, materials had not been distributed, and some of the classrooms had not been adequately prepared, for example. Savane said he thought classes would start on Monday as currently scheduled.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) In past meetings, Savane has been adamantly in favor of strike activity in order to force government action, even when a labor strike could have potentially unraveled the social situation as was the case in the aftermath of the military mutiny earlier this year. Savane frequently refers to the strikes of 2006 and 2007, and has repeatedly indicated that he believes further social unrest is just around the corner. Once the teachers get settled in and back to work, the unresolved union issues are likely to be a high priority topic for discussion amongst themselves. END COMMENT.
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